DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 099 713 CG 009 267

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TITLE Implementing an Elementary-Junior High Human Relations Program.
PUB DATE Dec 74
NOTE 15p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.75 HC-$1.50 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS *Adolescents; *Classroom Guidance Programs; Decision Making; *Discussion Groups; Elementary Education; *Human Relations Programs; *Individual Development; Junior High Schools; Problem Solving; Program Descriptions

ABSTRACT

This human relations program consists of a series of weekly classroom discussions and activities in the fifth through seventh grades, which give each student an opportunity to: (1) express, openly, opinions on matters of importance to him; (2) recognize and accept the feelings and concerns he shares with his peers; (3) consider how his feelings and actions may affect others; (4) evaluate and give consideration to the way peers have effectively dealt with personal feelings and concerns similar to his own; (5) examine and discuss decision making in situations that involve value conflicts; and (6) participate with other students in the identification and resolution of problems that are of concern to the group as a whole. Explanations and examples of these activities are presented. (Author/PC)

ED 099713

IMPLEMENTING AN ELEMENTARY-JUNIOR HIGH HUMAN RELATIONS PROGRAM

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December 1974

CG 009 867

BACKGROUND

The Human Relations program to be discussed has been in existence since the 70-71 school year. The junior high orientation program got underway one year after the start of the Human Relations program. The philosophy underlying the Human Relations program is similar to that espoused by Weinstein and Fantini in Toward Humanistic Education and Dr. Terry Borton in Reach, Touch, and Teach. These authors view the school curriculum in terms of three tiers. The first tier consists of the reading, computation, and writing skills that are needed to develop an efficient information retrieval capability. The second tier stresses the development of individual creativity and the exploration of interests. The third tier consists mainly of the consideration of commonly shared societal issues and problems that are related to one's sense of self. This tier stresses personal development, mastery of interpersonal skills, and increasing the student's awareness of his concerns and opinions-as well as the way in which they compare with the concerns of others. Basic to the goal of the third tier is the assumption that the major concerns of children center on: a concern about self image; a concern about connectedness-a wish to establish a connection with society at large; and a concern about control over one's own life-one's ability to effect the environment and bring about change.

The Human Relations program attempts to meet the objectives of the third tier through a series of weekly classroom discussions and activities that give each child an opportunity to:

(1) Openly express opinions and ideas on matters of importance to him.

(2) Recognize and accept the feelings and concerns he shares with other children of his age.

(3) Consider how his feelings and actions may effect other people.

(4) Evaluate and give consideration to the way peers have effectively dealt with personal feelings and concerns similar to his own.

(5) Examine and discuss the way in which one deals with situations where decisions must be made that involve conflicts between different social and personal values.

(6) Participate with other students in the identification and resolution of problems that are of concern to the group as a whole.

The school district within which the writer is employed consists of approximately 1300 students. The overall ability level of the children tends to follow the normal curve. Economically speaking, their parents would fall within the lower middle to middle income range. The wage earners are primarily in occupations that could be classified as skilled or semi-skilled.

The school population (K to 12) is housed in one long building that has been gradually added onto over the years. The primary grades are in the newest section at the western end of the building. The high school (junior and senior) is housed in a two story structure at the eastern end that is approximately 50 years old. Because of the building layout, the 6th grade elementary classes are almost in the same geographical area as a number of the junior and senior high classes. There are approximately 650 students at the elementary and high school levels.

The Human Relations program is part of the curriculum in the 5th grade (3 sections) and 6th grade (4 sections). There are approximately 20 to 25 students in each section. The program runs for 10 weeks at each grade level. The weekly meetings last from 40 to 60 minutes.

They are held during the time normally reserved for Science(5th grade) and Social Studies (6th grade).

The basis of the Human Relations program is a series of once a week, approximately hour long talk sessions. The use of class discussion as a vehicle for the expression of student concerns is not a new idea. William Glasser, in his book Schools Without Failure, describes a number of discussion techniques to be used with different types of social and academic problems. Stanford and Roach, in an article in the magazine People Watching, describe a number of extemporaneous class discussion techniques that are helpful for problem solving and increasing class cohesiveness. Uslander, Weiss, Telman, Wernick, and Higgins, in the book Our Universe, describe a program for primary age children that uses weekly meetings for the purpose of delving into and dealing with the personal concerns of young children. Originally conceived of as a sex education program, the authors quickly became aware that the concept of sexuality encompassed all aspects of the feelings of the young. The September 1971 issue of the New York State Psychological Services Bulletin makes reference to a Human Relations Program in the Bay Shore Public Schools. The program consists of a series of weekly talk sessions at the 4th grade level on topics of interest to the age group. The program is unique in that the students conduct the sessions themselves.

The talk session format used in our program was modeled after the one used in Bay Shore. The sessions are centered around topics provided

by the school psychologist. Some of the topics are based on what are considered common concerns of the children in the 5th and 6th grade. Other topics are introduced on the basis of what is expressed by the students during the meetings. Topics discussed include:

Making Friends	Junior High School
Being Afriad	Getting Angry
If I Could Be a Teacher	Discipline
Brothers and Sisters	Teasing
Teenagers	If I Could Change Adults

The sessions are conducted by a student leader whose primary function is to see that all who wish to speak have an opportunity to do so. A different student is leader each week. No child is forced to speak. Simple ground rules are set up. They include: (a) wait till you are called on before you speak, (b) no talking about other kids in class, and (c) no making fun of what someone else has said. The ground rules are directed at protecting the personal integrity of each child and making the sessions as non-threatening as possible.

During the sessions the school psychologist and teacher take a fairly passive role and sit outside the group. Occasionally either one may ask a question to stimulate discussion or redirect a student if he or she starts to violate the ground rules. The supervisory role of the adults in the room is minimal. Most of the time the discussions are carried primarily by the students in the class.

The Human Relations program differs from the one in Bay Shore in that a variety of techniques, other than continuous talk sessions, are introduced to meet the objectives of the program. Since much of

the emphasis of the program is on immediate concerns, role playing has proven to be a very effective device in increasing awareness of feelings, developing interpersonal skills, and exploring various problem solving techniques. Nancy Bauer, in the August/September 1970 issue of the Instructor ("Can You Teach Values?"), provides an excellent overview of how this technique can be used in conjunction with follow up discussion type activities. A similar format is used during the Human Relations meetings with the school psychologist taking a somewhat more directive role than he would have during a straight talk session.

Examples of the type of situations in which role playing was found to be helpful include:

Taking home a report card and discussing it with a parent.

Stopping in after school to see a teacher and discuss a "gripe" about something the teacher did in class.

Telling your parents that you think your older brother is on drugs.

Being new in school and making friends with a strange group of kids.

Making up with a friend after you've had a fight.

What has proven particularly effective is having children play the part of the "inside" person. The "inside" person is what the person is thinking while he is speaking. A number of children will be acting out a situation. Another person is chosen to stand behind a certain character and actually say what he is thinking while he is speaking. The technique provides fruitful dialogue for considering

such questions as "How is what we say sometimes different from what we think?", "What makes this so?", "How do our thoughts about others effect the way we react to them?", "How do our feelings about what others may be thinking effect what we do?"

A technique found to be useful in having students consider the relative nature of values, the conflicts that frequently develop between personal and social values, and the need for a personal decision when such a conflict exists, is one based on an idea presented by Barbara Ellis Lang in the March 1972 issue of Grade Teacher ("Decisions, Decisions"). The technique is as follows. A piece of tape is laid out on the floor. It runs the width of the room. All chairs and desks are pushed to the side leaving a large open space in front of the tape. The children sit on the desk tops or on the floor. The tape on the floor represents a "feelings ruler" extending from "absolutely right" at one end to "neutral" in the center to "absolutely wrong" at the other end. The children are told a story about a student or adult that involves a value conflict situation and some decision to act made by the main character. The children are asked to show how they feel about the rightness or wrongness of the decision by standing at some point on the feelings ruler. When they have done so they all sit in place, a student leader is chosen, and a discussion ensues with each student expressing the reasons for his feelings about what was done in the story. During the discussion consideration is given to the values involved, alternate ways of handling a situation, and thoughts on how the student's actions

in a similar situation might have differed from what they thought was"right."

A few examples of the stories used with the "feelings" ruler are:

A class is taking a written test. During the test one boy happens to look around and see another boy pass a piece of paper to the student next to him. The boy receiving the paper reads it and places it in his pocket. He continues with the test. After the test is finished and all have left the room, the boy who saw the exchange goes up to the teacher and tells him that these two kids were cheating. How do you feel about the rightness or wrongness of what the boy did?

A boy and his dog were playing in the backyard where his mother recently planted flowers. While playing they both stepped on the flowers and crushed them. The boy looked at the damage and saw that only the dog's prints were visible. He considered telling the truth and thought about what his mother might do. He decided not to say anything to her. After playing for a while longer he left the yard. How do you feel about the rightness or wrongness of what the boy did?

In addition to the above, a number of techniques are used to demonstrate how communication skills are frequently taken for granted, abused, or misused. Some examples of these include: having children carry on a conversation without speaking or having a whole class observe a story change as it is passed from one stranger to another as they enter a room. Schrank, in his book Teaching Human Beings, offers a variety of exercises that are helpful in this area. Among them is one that makes children aware of how much time we spend in discussions thinking of what we want to say instead of listening to the other person. The exercise involves setting up a temporary group condition where no one can speak before he summarizes the statement of the previous person to that person's satisfaction. The exercise also makes students aware of how much they read into what others say.

To summarize, one can say that the purpose of the Human Relations program is to satisfy the personal and social concerns of children so they may function more effectively in a world that is becoming increasingly complex. The project to be discussed in the following section grew out of the feelings and ideas expressed by many 6th grade students over a two year period. In a small way it demonstrated to these students that (a) their concerns merited serious consideration by others and (b) it was possible for kids to work together in bringing about a change that made things better for them.

Project: Junior High Orientation

It became evident from the 6th grade discussions during the first two years of the Human Relations program that there was one major event many students considered to be a major threat. The threatening aspects of the event involved the areas of concern over self image, connectedness, and control over one's life. The event was the transition from the 6th grade to junior high school.

Many students perceived this transition as a threat to their self image and sense of identity. The physical proximity of the 6th grade to the junior high led to much contact between the two groups of students. Sixth graders had to travel to the junior high area for band. Some had been caught in the halls while periods were changing. Others had gone into the bathrooms and found themselves facing thick cigaret smoke and upperclassmen. In talking they related tales of being intimidated and frightened by the larger and more aggressive students. Comments were made about the slamming and banging of lockers. Some students had been told exaggerated tales

by older siblings about how the 7th graders were singled out and treated roughly by teachers and upper classmen. Siblings also related tales of trouble with opening lockers that made the process seem like a surgical operation.

Few of the students expressed a sense of connectedness with the junior high school. The layout of the high school building was perceived as a maze of twisting hallways and strange offices. Aside from having siblings there, it was an alien place made up of older students and an unknown group of teachers. There was little to connect the school world they had lived in for 6 years with the school world they would be facing during the next school year.

Needless to say, the general conditions that existed led the 6th graders to feel quite impotent and powerless when it came to coping with the problems they saw lying ahead of them in junior high school. Nothing was available to help them get a grasp on things before they were thrown into a situation on what appeared a sink or swim basis.

These concerns about entering junior high school provided the writer with an opportunity to extend the Human Relations program into the 7th grade. Meetings were held with the 7th graders in order to discuss the subject of junior high school. The 7th graders explored the feelings they had about junior high while in 6th grade and what they thought would have helped them the most before coming into the new

building. They identified closely with the younger students and reacted enthusiastically to the idea of establishing a program of mutual communication with the 6th graders in order to make the transition easier for them. What follows are the steps that were taken as part of that program.

Both the 6th and 7th graders felt it would be best to start out with questions that the elementary students had about junior high. Sixth grade students in each section wrote up a list of questions. Duplicate questions were eliminated with records kept of what questions were asked by more than one person. The questions from the 6th grade sections were combined, organized into related areas, and submitted to the 7th graders.

On the basis of what was asked in the questions as well as their experiences, the 7th graders decided to procede with the following:

1. Plans were made to set up panels of 5 students to meet with each 6th grade section, answer the questions submitted by the 6th graders, and respond to any further questions the elementary students had. Two panels were set up. Each panel was responsible for meeting with two 6th grade sections. Panel participation was on a voluntary basis. Each panelist was to answer the questions in a particular category with emphasis placed on the questions asked by a large number of students. One panelist wrote up a chart of teacher names, subject

areas they taught, and room locations. This was passed around during the panel discussions with plans made to have it duplicated and given to each 6th grader. Another student brought along his class schedule, explained it to the 6th graders, and passed it around so they could examine it. Prior to meeting with the 6th grades each panel met with its class of 7th graders and role played the type of discussion that might actually take place.

2. Both 6th and 7th graders agreed that "getting around" in the junior high school was a matter of great concern-particularly during the first few weeks of school. The junior high students felt it would help a lot of the 6th graders had maps of the junior high school. Four students volunteered to come in on their own time and map out parts of the building.

3. It was also agreed that it would be helpful if the 6th graders were shown around the high school by the 7th graders. Six pairs of 7th grade students volunteered to act as tour guides. Class time was spent discussing how a tour would be conducted, what would be shown, and what would be said. A block of time was worked out that would be most convenient for taking groups of 6th grade students out of class. Plans were made to show around approximately 6 students at a time. Arrangements were made to have the 7th grade guides released from class for the afternoon. Prior to touring the guides met as a group on their own time, planned out their tour route, and practiced both walking and speaking their way over it.

4. Some of the 7th graders suggested it would be a good idea for the 6th graders to have a chance to learn how to open a locker. Initially this was planned as part of the tour. This was abandoned when it seemed it would take up too much time on the tour route. Instead, combination mechanisms that were used as replacements in lockers were borrowed from the custodians. They were distributed to the 6th grade classes for the purpose of demonstration. Enough mechanisms were available to allow the 6th grade sections to break down into small groups and practice working the combinations. A number of 7th graders volunteered to go into the 6th grades as demonstrators.

The junior high orientation project proved to be quite successful. It has become the end of the year "culminating activity" for the Human Relations program at the 6th grade level. The sixth graders react positively to the panel discussions and the tours. Seventh grade students stop the writer and offer to serve on the project even before formal plans are made. Parents have volunteered comments on how they thought the orientation program made the transition from elementary to junior high easier for their son or daughter. The project demonstrates how programs responsive to immediate, major student concerns generate enthusiasm, a willingness to participate, and a sense of satisfaction among those who are involved.

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